

Second Sunday of Advent – Cycle B

In our gospel reading today we hear about John the Baptist. The Saint was famous in his own rite. He had plenty of followers and had a message to preach. He wore animal skins and lived in the desert which meant he was a prophet. He thought the people should repent and change their ways. Repent sounds so harsh and insensitive. The word brings images of fire and brimstone sermons. Repent simply means to change directions. If you are walking off the cliff, you should change your direction. You should be happy if someone tells you that.

Repenting is a call to transform ourselves to the way of the Lord. Our life is so short here on earth. You know, a blink of the eye when compared to eternity. What you do here on earth is just a seed. A seed that you plant to see what might grow into eternity. The seed you plant could harvest honey or locust. Those that accept the gospel of salvation in faith would know blessings (signified by honey) and those who do not are planting the seeds of their own destruction (symbolized by the locusts).

Not that we are doomed to destruction if we are not perfect. We are created in God's own image and the more we conform to that image, the more we will be able to live a life here on earth as God planned for us. But all too often we live a life based on an image created by ourselves. We live as if the world has it all right. We live by standards established by consumerism and individualism. We believe God has left us to our devices because He has not yet fulfilled His promise to reward those that led righteous lives. But we heard in the reading from second Peter that we can't expect God to deliver based on our impatient human standards. With the Lord one day is like a thousand years and thousand years is like one day. The will come like a thief, when you least expect it. We conduct life using our own wits, our own goals, our own desires. We marry, or just live together, because it feels good. Not always a sacramental marriage.

I was married once before, BL, before Linda. It was not a good marriage and caused a lot of pain for both of us. The pain I still feel today. That was back in the 70's. That marriage was not formed in the image of God. The two of us conformed the marriage in an image suited to our own good. What we thought was our own good. When that marriage was ended after a short time, thank God, I had a dim view of marriage. If this is what marriage is, I don't want any part of it. I developed a fear and lack of faith in marriage. At that point in my life, I turned inward, I was my own man. I was my own man. Can you see that that is the problem? We are made in God's image, we are not our own.

Thank God that God got to me somehow. I was not baptized yet, but God had a plan for me and told me I was going to marry Linda. Through my fears and lack of faith in the institution of marriage, I would not make that leap of faith on my own. But with Jesus in me, with the Jesus in me becoming bigger than my fears; bigger than the man I can be alone, I can become part of God's plan and start that family with Linda. What a blessing this marriage is.

We lose sight of our God-given image when we try to create our own images. Let me tell you, YOU must decrease so that Jesus can increase inside of you.

John 3:30 – He must increase, I must decrease. Those are the words of John the Baptist. Of course, he was talking about his ministry, his presence, his hold on followers must decrease so that the true Messiah, Jesus can increase. John the Baptist was just showing the way for one greater than he. One that he is not worthy to even stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.

BTW. There will be a test later; John 3:30 – He must increase, I must decrease.

So, what is overshadowing Jesus in you? Are you so big that we cannot see Jesus? Are you overshadowed by something in the church that bothers you? If so, you must decrease. Are there church rules that just irk you? Perhaps there is something about the homilies, the pastor, the deacon, the building that is closing your mind to the gospel message. You want to be totally here whenever you can for the liturgies of the word and the Eucharist. You want to be totally here for the reconciliation service next Saturday at 10 O'clock. You want to conform yourself to your God-given image and God-given plan. He must increase, I must decrease.

Advent is about the coming of our Lord. We are waiting for the coming of the Lord with anticipation, not in dread of divine judgment. We know that Jesus is with us here and now, but we are eagerly waiting to see Jesus face to face. What we do with our lives while we are waiting is all about the gospel. That's why we want to be totally present in the liturgy of the word and the Eucharist. We want to lead the life God intended for us. But there are so many distractions and temptations that put us off our game.

In the first reading today from Isaiah, we hear comforting words to an Israelite nation that had been lured by false prophets with lies, their own weakness, and lack of trust in God to a place far from their cherished homeland. They were exiled in Babylon. They got there because they were tempted by pagan idols among other violations. Just like today, they got involved in social practices that are detrimental to families and the lives of young people. Practices that can lead to human trafficking which is out of control in the world today. But God can save us from that. God spoke the words in Isaiah today, "Comfort, give comfort to my people." God comes like a gentle shepherd inviting all who have strayed or shifted from their God-center to repent and return. The Jesus in us is bigger than our weakness – let Jesus increase.

In our second reading from second Peter, the author addresses our weaknesses in applying patience. We expect things when we want them – we shouldn't have to wait. We have no tolerance for waiting. If we had more tolerance for waiting we would develop more capacity to conduct ourselves in holiness. Holiness is nothing more than living life as a whole person. A whole person is well rounded and not one-sided or superficial. As we await the Lord we have time to develop our mental being, our physical being, our loving being, and our spiritual being. We can look forward to the

coming of the Lord with anticipation not a dread of divine judgment. The Jesus in us is bigger than our weakness – let Jesus increase.

In the gospel reading of Mark, we are reminded again of John the Baptist and his role to play second fiddle to Jesus. The role he happily played for the Messiah. It was the ego of John the Baptist, the ego he got when people flocked to him constantly, that allowed him to deflect attention from himself towards Jesus. We have the same goal to direct attention away from us to God. Like the time when I had to direct the attention away from my fears of marriage to what God wanted in my life. It can't be about me all of the time, God has something to say – it's a good thing to pay attention. I hear a lot about the importance of being beautiful, stronger, and more independent. But I am dependent – I am dependent on God. Jesus in me is bigger than my independence – let Jesus increase.

Do you know who really taught us how to wait? Mary, the mother of God. As soon as the angel Gabriel left Mary after the annunciation, she knew that Jesus was with her – but not with her. She had to wait 9 months. What did Mary do for 9 months of waiting? She wanted to help people. She took a grueling road trip that took a few days on a donkey and she took Jesus along in her pregnant status. She went to help Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist. That is a lesson for us all – what should you do when you are waiting for the Lord – take Jesus to someone who needs Jesus – let Jesus increase.

The gospel of Mark starts “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.” Those words are more than just a statement of introduction to Mark. They mean the start of Jesus' mission and ministry on earth. And John the Baptist is proclaiming the advent of the stronger one who will baptize in the Holy Spirit. Though Jesus did not baptize in the gospels, His words and deeds constitute a “baptism in the Spirit.” You are part of that mission with your words and deeds as long as YOU don't become so large that we cannot see Jesus – let Jesus increase.

John 3:30 He must increase, I must decrease